

Discover Islam

THE GARDEN OF PARADISE

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN





*In the name of Allah
The Merciful, the Compassionate*

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For more information, please write to:

Goodword Books

1, Nizamuddin West Market
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email: info@goodwordbooks.com
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Introduction

God has created an ideal world called paradise. It is a world of everlasting joy and bliss. No turmoil or pain mars its delight. One is never beset there by anguish or calamity. It is a trouble-free world of infinite blessings, where one will experience neither death, boredom nor grief.

The search for such an ideal world is an instinctive urge in man. Everybody is searching for an invisible paradise; but none is able to find a paradise of such infinite blessings in the present finite world. God has reserved it for the next world.

None can earn paradise automatically; only those who perform heavenly actions on earth will be deserving of it. God has divided our lives into two parts: a short period on earth, and the rest in the hereafter. This world is for action. The next world is for reaping the rewards of our actions.

Man is free to do as he wishes on earth, but his free will is no more than a test. He should treat it as such.

He should not revel in his power. Those who are not deluded by their temporary power, and never lose sight of their true position, will be accommodated in paradise. Those who rebel on the basis of their worldly power will abide in hell.

All real power in this world belongs to God alone. He is the Lord of all things. No one can escape from His control for an instant. Those who recognize this fact will submit to God of their own accord. They are the ones who are worthy of paradise. Those who deny this fact and proceed in whatever direction their impulse takes them, are offenders in God's sight. They will have no share in the blessings of the life-hereafter.

Wahiduddin Khan
October, 1980
The Islamic Centre,
New Delhi

Belief in God

God is the source of all goodness. He can be seen everywhere in the universe. His power is evident in the form of light and heat. He converts matter into greenery and flowing water. His glory is made manifest in colour, taste and fragrance. Motion and magnetism are evidence of His strength.

Belief in a God of such supreme perfection is more than just a dogma. It illuminates man's soul and enraptures his heart. If one relishes a delicious fruit, and goes into ecstasy on hearing a tuneful melody, how then can one fail to be moved by the discovery of God, who is the fountainhead of all goodness.

When one truly discovers God, He becomes like a fragrance which one savours, a delicious taste which one relishes, a spectacle, which captivates one's vision, a melody that never ceases to thrill. God has created all these exquisite delights: His Being is their treasure house. Drawing close to God is like entering paradise. It is like dwelling in a garden of exquisite beauty and fragrance, or being close to the source of all light.

Discovery of God

God's true servant is one who is thrown into such spiritual excitement by the discovery of God that he always has God in his thoughts. The beholding of God in all His majesty inspires such awe and fear in him that the hair of his body stands on end. One who finds God fears and loves Him above all else. His entire attention is focused on God alone.

When he reads the Qur'an, he is overwhelmed with gratitude to God for having guided him, thus saving him from the darkness of ignorance. When he considers the life-pattern of the holy Prophet, his whole being is thankful to God for having provided man with such an impeccable example of how life should be lived, and having then preserved that model for all time. When he prostrates himself in worship, he feels as if God has embraced him in His mercy. When he eats, every fibre of his being thanks God for the nourishment and sustenance with which He has provided man. When he drinks water, tears of thanks flow from his eyes, for if God had not provided water, how would he be able to quench his thirst?

God's Neighbour

One who has discovered God becomes close to God even in this world. His spirit is bathed in the light of God. If even the sight of flowers arouses finer feelings in a person, how can one discover God and not be moved to a state of sublime ecstasy?

Many people claim to be close to God, but are still in fact a long way from Him. They speak of God, but their actions show that they have not even recognized their Lord.

They take God's name, but have not tasted the sweetness of the name that they utter. They claim to have found God, but have not experienced the fragrance of His garden. They display religious fervour in public, but there are no signs of their souls being illuminated with the light of God. They consider that God's paradise is reserved exclusively for them, but their lives are not touched by a heavenly breeze.

A strange God it must be who does not cause any vibration in one's thoughts. A strange heaven it must be to which people who show no reflection of the heavenly in their words and deeds will be

automatically admitted. A strange hereafter it must be which will be inherited for all eternity by people who did not seek life-everlasting and were interested only in ephemeral pleasures.

It is regrettable that there are people who claim to have found God while in truth they have not found Him at all.

Spiritual Nourishment

A believer derives spiritual nourishment from the whole universe; he will partake of the same nourishment in material form in paradise. When zephyrs caress his body in this world, he feels as if a divine hand is stroking him. He beholds God's unfathomable mercy in the flowing motion of rivers. The chirping of birds inspires him to sing songs of divine praise. Whoever is granted such vision as comes with true belief sees evidence of God's glory in all things.

A tree is just a simple wooden structure, but what beautiful flowers blossom on it. Dry wood, growing on dry land, suddenly undergoes a silent transformation. Its branches burgeon with luxuriant blooms.

This happens so that, just by gazing at such a spectacle, one may feel inspired to cry out to God: “Lord, I too am like a piece of wood; only You can make me flower. I am like a barren stalk; only You can make me blossom and thrive. I am just an insignificant being; only You can put meaning into my life. I am standing on the verge of Hell; only You can enable me to enter paradise. I am far from You; only You can reach out and take me under Your protection.”

Closeness to God

Only those who have recognized God in this world will be admitted to God’s paradise in the next. The discoverer of God is one who sees God with conviction, despite the fact that in this world God is invisible; who hears God speaking to him with each throb of his heart; who reads the Book of God with a feeling that the pages of his own nature are being unfolded.

The discoverer of God is one whose moribund spirit has been quickened by faith; whose heart has been purified by remembrance of God; who proceeds by the light of God; whose heart trembles at the very mention of God’s name; who receives God with tears and whose whole being surrenders to Him.

Whoever is close to God is close to heaven. Closeness to God begins in this world and culminates in the next. A person who experiences closeness to God feels that he is seeing an unseen reality. He feels very close to the most distant of Beings. He engages in conversation with One who does not seem to be present. He showers his affection on the most awesome of Beings. He establishes direct contact with the One who cannot be approached through any intermediary.

Paradise—The Greatest of Gifts

Everything in heaven and on earth bows to God, but no natural act of prostration can compare to man's obeisance. Other creatures submit to God involuntarily. Man does so expressly, of his own free will.

Man submits to God consciously and independently. No action in the world can compare with man's submission. Herein lies the real value of man. Man is the only creature who is fully aware of his total helplessness in the face of God's omnipotence. He counts himself as nothing and God as everything. He renounces his own ego in the face of divinity. He forsakes all power and surrenders totally to God. He

controls his speech for God's sake, as if he had no tongue of his own.

Becoming a true believer is the greatest thing that can happen in the world. The reward for such belief must be similarly great. Heaven is the name of that reward. Paradise is not the price of one's actions: it is the gift of God. It is granted to those who offer God something, which nothing else in the universe has offered. Accordingly, it is a gift that He has granted to no other creature.

Heavenly Vision

All of God's creation is so astounding that, were a man to behold it, he would be lost in admiration of its absolute perfection. The face of the Creator is reflected in the wonders of His creation. But we have seen so much of the world that our senses have been dulled. We have become so familiar with the world around us that we fail to marvel at it as we should. Water, birds and trees—indeed everything in nature—is too wonderful for words. Everything is a reflection of the Creator. But we cannot see how amazing it all is. We are too familiar with it all.

In this man is being tested. It is for him to perceive

extraordinary qualities in ordinary things. If one gazes at the world in awe, one will feel God's presence everywhere. One will live on earth as if one was face to face with God.

To behold God and to feel His immanence is the greatest discovery man can make in this world. If one is blessed with heavenly vision, one will perceive the light of God in rays of sunlight. The spectacle of trees will portray to one the countenance of God. One will feel God's touch in every gentle breeze. When one lays one's forehead on the ground in prostration one will feel as if one has cast oneself at God's feet. God is everywhere, but only those fortunate ones who have been blessed with heavenly vision can behold him.

God's Worshipers

Only one who has really been in love with someone can be moved to tears by the memory of his beloved. If one feels no attachment for someone, one cannot, simply because some occasion calls for it, force oneself to cry for that person.

Some adopt an attitude of humility towards their fellow men, while others remain arrogant. Some are fair and just, others oppress and persecute their

fellows. Some are humble, others are proud. Some submit to the truth, others do not. People of such opposing attitudes cannot both worship God in a similar fashion. Only the first category of people will be genuinely humble in their worship. The second category may adopt the humble postures of worship—as the occasion demands—but they cannot thereby become God’s humble servants. Humility in one’s worship stems from a life of humility. One who is not humble in the totality of his existence cannot then be truly humble in his worship.

Those who truly worship God will enter paradise. They are the ones who serve God at all times, not just at specified times of worship. Paradise is an abode of truth. It has been prepared specially for those who are true in their worship. Those who are insincere will never be admitted to such an abode.

A Complete World

The pleasures of this world are short-lived. Its beauty soon fades from our vision. How much man longs for worldly honour and happiness, but before he has even begun to savour them, they begin to dwindle away to nothing. The world has everything that man wants, but it is not possible for

anyone—even those who seem to have everything in life—to achieve all that they desire. Happiness is not necessarily the lot of the successful.

Man, as a being, is perfect, but his world is tragically imperfect. His life is meaningless until he inherits a world free of all limitations and disadvantages.

As a compensation for the incompleteness of this world, God has given us paradise. But gaining entry to it will be no easy matter. The price that has to be paid for an after-life of perfection is living through the present world of imperfection and being able to sacrifice this world for the next. This is the only way to enter paradise. Those who are not able to make this sacrifice will also enter an eternal world after death, but it will be a world of anguish and despair as opposed to one of joy and bliss.

Light After Darkness

Morning follows night. That which was concealed in darkness is revealed in the light of day. This is a sign of what is to come.

The light of eternity will tear the veils, which have concealed the realities of human existence in the

world. Everyone will appear in his true light. It will become clear who among us was masquerading as an ideal human being, while acting solely on baser animal instincts. It will become clear who was only paying lip service to righteousness. It will become clear who was falsely claiming to be a servant of God.

The truth about many others will also be revealed on that day. People will realize the true importance of those whom they used to rate poorly. Those who were never honoured in world gatherings will find honour among the angels. Those who were rejected by men will be accepted by God. Those who were wrongly accused of impiety in the world will be hailed for their piety in the presence of the Almighty.

When all Things Come to Light

The cosmos is full of meaning. It accepts nothing, which is contrary to its nature and is not in accord with its design. Yet man wreaks evil and indulges in corruption on this our earth, the most fertile and exquisite portion of the universe. Truth is trampled

upon in the name of progress and the cosmos, despite its meaningfulness, stands by in silence. It does not condemn the evil, which is openly committed on earth. It does not proclaim truth and falsehood for what they are.

Does the cosmos contradict itself? Is it incapable of expressing itself? There are birds that sing melodiously, but is there no cosmic voice to proclaim the truth? There is, certainly, but God has silenced the voice of truth until the resurrection of man. When man rises from the dead, all things will testify to the truth. The whole universe will bear witness to the truth, and will give evidence before God. Justice will prevail. People will then realize that just as the cosmos possessed a sun to convert night into day, it also possessed a means of bringing to light such deeds as had remained concealed in obscurity.

Those who had rebelled on earth will pay in full for their rebellion; they will be cast into the fire of Hell. Those who had served God will be rewarded for their righteousness; God will be merciful to them. They will be admitted to heaven, where they will enjoy an everlasting life of honour and content.

A Dream World

God has created man with innumerable desires and longings. The means exist in this world for the fulfillment of his desires, but even so, man is unable to fulfill them. Sometimes old age intervenes and sometimes man's inherent limitations prevent him from achieving what he wishes; sometimes he is hindered by some weakness and sometimes he is not favoured by fortune.

Is man fated to come into the world with all sorts of desires and then leave the world, disappointed at having achieved none of them? This is not the case: God has prepared a paradise for man where he will be granted all that he desires. After death man enters into a complete world, a world free of all defects. He will find there everything that he had longed for on earth but had been unable to obtain.

Heaven after death is for those fortunate ones who live righteous lives on earth; who prove by their noble actions that they deserve an equally noble reward. Man will find in the next life the dream world that eludes him on earth. Only those who have paid the price in this life will deserve heaven in the next.

Loss Turned to Gain

Man longs more than anything for a world full of happiness. This longing is inborn in every human being, but everyone leaves the world with only a partial sense of fulfillment. Man wants to see all his desires satisfied in this world, but the world cannot provide what he wants; so he is left in a state of disillusionment.

We may build for ourselves the kind of home we have always dreamed of having but, in it, we are still beset by the rivalry, jealousy, enmity and vengeance of others. We make huge advances in the field of technology, only to see them rendered meaningless by new problems. Then, while we are still on the road to success, death puts an end to everything.

Man is quite right to long for an ideal world, but he can never find it on earth. He will have to wait until the next life for the realization of such a world. Faith in eternity invests our life on earth with meaning. Our life on earth is one of struggle, but in eternity, we will be rewarded for our efforts on earth. If one considers this world the ultimate destination, one is bound to be disappointed; but if one looks ahead to

the Hereafter, then a world of eternal contentment opens out before one.

In a world where we seem bound to lose, only a faith, which tells us the secret of turning our losses into gains, can be the true one.

Avoiding Disaster

Man works hard to build a solid financial base for his life. When he builds a fine house for himself, he feels that his efforts have been rewarded. He builds success for himself in the world. Then suddenly death overtakes him. He leaves his home for the grave. His fine body is devoured by earth and worms. His worldly gain comes to nothing, as if there had been no connection between him and his achievements.

He dreamt of mansions in the world; now he has to enter the grave. Finally he is raised from the dead and brought before the Lord to be judged. There he will be absolutely destitute. He will not even have clothes to cover his body. Everything he had earned will amount to nothing. His friends will desert him. He will be left powerless. He will be deprived of all the supports, which made him so sure of himself on earth.

It is an ill-fated journey on which one meets disaster as one nears one's destination. It is a strange traveler who thinks that he is heading towards his goal, and only realizes that he has been on the wrong track all along as he nears his destination.

The Universal Way

The whole universe has submitted to God. Everything proceeds on the path that God has laid down for it. Trees stand high, but they cast their shadows on the ground in humility. Winds blow, but they do not clash with anybody. The sun radiates light on all alike; it does not discriminate between the weak and the mighty. Rain falls from the sky, benefiting all whom it reaches; it is not prejudiced against anyone. Birds and ants are busy in their search for their food, but they do not steal one another's share.

This is the path ordained by God for the universe, and this is the way that man should live also. God's beloved servants are humble like the shadow of a tree. They pass one another by like gentle puffs of wind. They are kind and well-meaning to one and all alike in the manner of the rain. They nourish others like river-water. They shed light on all like the sun. They are always careful not to trouble anyone.

Such pure souls will dwell in heaven. The people of heaven will live with one another like flowers in a garden. They will exude fragrance and will converse with one another in gentle tones. They will meet with one another like gentle breezes. How extraordinary will heaven and its surroundings be.

The Islamic Life

An Islamic life comes into being like a tree. A verdant tree can only grow when it has learned to blend with the terrestrial and celestial orders of nature; likewise a person becomes Islamic by deriving spiritual nourishment from the whole of God's universe.

Ritual practices and revolutionary slogans do not go to make an Islamic life. One can only become a true Muslim when one begins to receive the light of God. God has provided a world of nourishment for trees; in like manner, spiritual nourishment is always available to man. Just as the mighty oak springs from the acorn buried deep in the womb of nature, so an Islamic life grows from deeply-rooted faith. Be it man or tree, both have to attach themselves to vaster orders if they are to reach perfection. The difference is that trees come into existence involuntarily, whereas

man can only develop of his own free will.

Those who thrive on God's spiritual provision in this world will flourish in the hereafter. Those who neglected to partake of such provision will be raised from the dead in a spiritually impoverished state, no matter how splendid was their condition on earth.

The Believer: God's Industry

Everyone is an industry. Some produce nothing but flames and poison in the sense that they make arrogant misuse of their power whenever they are given the opportunity; they are ostentatious in their expenditure; they aim at the destruction of those who are under their command; they are bitter and malignant towards those with whom they disagree; they are selfish, unjust and stubborn in their dealings.

Such people have established an infernal industry within themselves. Whatever enters into them comes out in an evil form. They will find themselves engulfed by that which they have produced. They will enter a fire of their own making.

Others respond to the possession of power in a humble manner. They are quick to acknowledge just criticism.

They spend their wealth for the cause of God. They do not assert themselves when given the opportunity; they prefer to adopt an attitude of humility and attribute all credit to God alone. They are just and benevolent towards those who are at their mercy.

Such people have established God's industry within themselves. Whatever enters into them is moulded into a divine form. They are cultivating a crop of fragrant flowers in this world, and they will abide eternally in the gardens, which they have cultivated on earth.

Action or Acknowledgement

True faith should become an integral part of one's thinking. It should permeate one's heart and mind. Everything — one's thoughts and desires, one's love and fear should be subordinated to one's faith. This is the supreme degree of faith. One who is of such faith is protected by God in this world, and one who is provided with divine protection on earth is sure of it in the hereafter.

There are other believers who do both good and evil, but they admit their faults. Hopefully, God will forgive them, for He is forgiving and merciful.

The strong in faith act according to their belief, but those who are weaker in their faith cannot achieve such consistency in thought, word and deed. They, too, will receive God's eternal blessings, but to do so, they should show contrition and not persist in their errors; they should openly admit their faults and not try to justify them; they should confess their guilt instead of trying to explain it away; they should show no signs of irritation when their faults are pointed out, but should bow in acquiescence; they should make up, with tears of humble entreaty, for what they lack in virtue. Those who do not even have this much to offer cannot expect forgiveness from God.

The Long Road of Patience

God's beloved servant strives to please God, not himself; he follows the path of truth rather than the dictates of his own self; he attaches more importance to honour in the next life than to worldly prestige; he does not revenge himself on others, even if they wrong him time and time again. This is the path of patience. Certainly, the road of patience is long and arduous, but it is the only road that can lead one to paradise. Paradise will be granted to the patient, and the patient are those who are willing to bear every loss for God's sake.

In this world of trial, one is bound to encounter difficulties and setbacks. Those who desire paradise should know that the path that they will have to tread will not be an easy one: they will have to bear with persecution from others; they will have to endure protracted periods of waiting; they will have to put up with persecution from rivals. Those who are seeking the truth should be careful not to lose patience and succumb to stresses and strains. If they do, they will lose their way to paradise, and will not be able to reach their destination.

The road to paradise is one long road of patience. Only those who are willing to bear the hardships of patience, who carry on regardless of every hurt, who turn the other cheek to every blow, will be worthy to enter heaven.

God's Tree

A tree is but a manifestation of a seed's potential to derive sustenance from earth and water, and produce one of the most beautiful sights in the world in the form of a trunk, branches, leaves and flowers.

Man is much the same as a tree. He has been put on

earth like a seed. But he can only grow into a tree by virtue of his own efforts. Providence, however, has granted him innumerable sources of nourishment, and opportunities exist on earth for man to build an eternal future for himself. His efforts on earth will have the reward of the verdant gardens of paradise in the next world. He will dwell there in eternal contentment.

But those who do not partake of this divine sustenance are like seeds, which are cast on to a rock or on barren land. Such seeds will never grow into trees. One who does not make use of the opportunities for growth in this world is like a defective seed, which never grows into a tree. Such a person will meet with eternal failure. The world that he will inherit in the next life will be a total desert.

A heavenly soul is like a fine tree, which grows in this world and is then transplanted in God's evergreen garden in the after-life.

The Inheritance of Paradise

The freedom which man has been given on earth is not permanent. It has been granted to him for a certain time and for a specific reason: that he may

be put to the test. God wishes to see who make good use of their freedom, so that He may reward such people. Those who are spoiled by their freedom will be cast into Hell.

The world will end when the test of man is complete. When man's test has run its course, the Lord will take over direct control of the earth, as He has already done with the rest of the universe. Then the good will be separated from the bad. The good will inherit life everlasting in heaven, while the wicked will be condemned to eternal punishment.

Those who are worthy of abiding in the future world of heaven are being selected in this world. Those who obey God, despite their freedom, and voluntarily impose the will of God upon themselves, are deserving of paradise. During the period of man's trial, all kinds of people have been allowed to inhabit the world. When the trial of man has run its course, however, only the righteous will be fit to inherit the evergreen world of God. Others will be denied entrance into heaven; they will be cast into a world of everlasting anguish and despair.

Selection for Paradise

Man has been granted freedom in this world of trial and tribulation, but he has misused his freedom and has sown cruelty and corruption on earth. How can God tolerate so much evil? The only possible answer is that, without it, those noble souls who are fit to abide in paradise would not stand out from the others. There would be no basis on which to select them. Only if man is free can he prove that he is willing to renounce all power for God's sake alone. The unbounded evil that exists on earth is, in fact, the price that has to be paid for unbounded good. On the strength of this good, a selection is made on earth, from the mass of humanity, of those blessed souls who, consciously and of their own free will, are obedient to God; who submit to the Lord on principle, and not because they are forced to do so.

Such people stand head and shoulders above the rest of mankind. They could deny the truth, but they do not do so. They could give precedence to themselves, but they always put God first. They could establish themselves in seats of power, but they waive all claims to power and follow truth and justice. Man has to be free to prove himself fit for paradise; he must also pay the price for his freedom.

Two Kinds of Soul

There are two types of human beings: those who follow base desires and those who adopt a pure way of life. There are those who despise others and thrive on ostentatious and self-centered pursuits. Their souls are inimical to truth and their minds are full of selfish and conceited thoughts. They like inconveniencing others; they derive immense pleasure from taking advantage of the weaknesses of others. Such people are living on infernal provision, and will abide in Hell in the Hereafter.

Then there are those who are pure in spirit. Others' success causes them genuine pleasure. They are happy to forgive those who are at their mercy. They are loving and wish their fellows well; they thrive on humility and meekness. Such people are living in a heavenly atmosphere. They are content to concede a disputed point to others. When their faults are pointed out they are quick to admit them. They are restless until they have paid back their debts. Such people are living on heavenly provision; they will abide eternally in the lush gardens of paradise.

Thankfulness

Man is never satisfied with what he has; he always seeks more. As a result, he never ceases to be discontented. God has favoured everyone in some way or another, but man is more concerned with what he does not have; he pays scant regard to what he has. People who have this attitude cannot be moved to offer thanks to God. They are lacking in that priceless virtue which is essential for admission into paradise.

No one can be absolutely happy on earth. That is the way the world has been made. If cold climates have their drawbacks, so do hot climates. If low-income groups encounter difficulties, so do high-income groups. If the weak have a hard life, neither is it easy for those who wield power. There is no end to the problems of this world, but man should persevere in spite of all the difficulties he encounters, for he is being tested in this world. He should concentrate on earning God's pleasure, and not on achieving a trouble-free life, for that is something, which can only be achieved in the next world.

The greatest offering that anyone who wishes to earn a place in paradise can offer his Lord is a thankful heart.

The only way to cultivate a feeling of thankfulness is to rise above the difficulties and problems of life. The price of heaven is gratitude; only those who have paid this price will enter heaven.

Godly People

Most people seem to be devoted to God under normal conditions. Then, when something untoward happens, they suddenly change. Emotions like love and hate, questions of honour and prestige overcome them and push their attachment to God into the background. They are devout under normal conditions, but in extraordinary situations, they act like people who have no thought of God.

Those who are really devoted to God fear Him at all times. They do not let themselves be led astray by their love for someone; they stay within the bounds that God has laid down. They are never overcome by hate; they are just with everyone, even with their enemies. Worldly honour and prestige can never prevent them from acknowledging the truth.

God's true servants earnestly seek to rectify themselves; they are conscious of their faults; they constantly scrutinize their actions and are able to see

themselves objectively; they look at themselves from a realistic point of view—the point of view from which God looks at them.

These are the ones who will be admitted into God's paradise. There they will know neither affliction nor fear.

The Seeker Finds

People take heaven's name but act in a manner more fitting for Hell. This means that they have never sought heaven from God; if they had, God would never have let them proceed on a path, which can only lead them to Hell.

It is impossible that one should ask God for heaven and be given hell instead; that one should seek to fear the Lord and that He should harden one's heart; that one should desire to remember the Lord at all times and that He should leave one in a state of forgetfulness; that one should long to aspire to eternity and that God should fill one's heart with love of the world: that one should aspire to true, heartfelt piety and that He should make one's piety spiritless; that one should wish to worship God and that he should let one worship personalities instead.

If one does not have what is desirable in life, it means that one has not sought it. Those who seek will always find. How can the Lord of Universe leave His servant in such a state that he will be able to cry out on the Day of Resurrection, "Lord, I asked You for heaven and You have given me Hell." Truly, this is out of the question. One cannot conceive of such a thing happening. There is not a day on which the Lord does not grant His mercy to His servants; yet He gives only to those who ask. One cannot blame the Bestower if the recipient has no desire for what He has to offer.

Citizen of Paradise

In heaven God's praises will be sung on all sides; only He will be glorified. Only those who praise and glorify God on earth will be fit to enter such a heaven. If one attributes greatness to oneself or other people, then how can one be fit for heaven? Words will accord with actions in paradise. There will be no deceit there. People will not exploit others, or hurt others' feelings. Only those who have proved by their actions on earth that they are capable of living up to such high standards will be admitted into paradise.

Heaven will be a world full of positive actions. Only those who think positively on earth will be able to enter such a heaven. Those who engage in negative and destructive pursuits in this world cannot hope to enter paradise in the next world. Man will not be able to hurt man in heaven. Only those who have not harboured jealous or evil thoughts towards others will be deserving of such a paradise, for only by refraining from harming others can one show that one is worthy of being preserved from evil oneself. Heaven will be free of impurity and frivolity. Only those who refrain from vain and base pursuits in this world will be granted entry into this heavenly abode.

Submission to God

Man can come close to God only through humility. God's favour falls upon those of his servants who are humble. If humility is not forced, but comes from the heart, it will be more precious to one than anything else. Real humility is to acknowledge one's true position on earth. Humility brings one close to God.

A person who does not know what it is to be humble cannot derive pleasure from his worship. If one's life is based on discrimination, one cannot appreciate the

equality of man. An egocentric person cannot taste the joy of recognizing God's greatness. Those who delight in proving others wrong cannot realize the delight of discovering and admitting their own errors. Those who are used to applying one set of values to themselves and a different set to others cannot understand that judging oneself by the same standards as one sets for others is the greatest wealth in life.

Heaven is for those who delight in heavenly actions; whose worship and whole way of life take on a heavenly hue. A heavenly person will restrain jealous feelings and suppress the urge for vengeance. He will rise above sectarian prejudices. He will act fairly towards everyone—even those he disagrees with. He will judge people on the grounds of truth; he will not be influenced by false pretensions. Only he who is so enamoured of such conduct that he cannot depart from it under any circumstances is truly fit for paradise.

The Lesson of a Tree

Take a look at a tree. Its trunk is firm and solid, but its leaves, fruits and flowers are weak and impermanent. Yet the beauty of its leaves, the colourfulness of its flowers, and the delicacy of its fruits show that these less substantial parts of the

tree have deserved greater attention from nature than the stronger parts. It seems as if the trunk and the branches were created to bring into existence the fragile masterpieces of creation called leaves, flowers and fruits.

This is a sign of God, showing man what his Lord requires of him, and what he should do to make the tree of his life blossom. A tree shows man that he should seek the meaning of things beneath the surface; he should not be over-impressed by outward strength. People who adopt this attitude to life will be admitted into paradise.

Those who will not be admitted include the man who worships stone and ignores truth; who is polite and humane towards the mighty, and looks down with disdain on those towards whom God would really like him to be polite and humane. He is charitable for the sake of fame and withholds charity when there is no fame to be gained, though that is the only charity acceptable to God.

Belonging to the Next World

Heaven belongs to those who long for it. To one who really longs for heaven, everything else

seems insignificant in comparison. Things of the world lose their value. Eternal matters become so important in his sight that worldly matters pale into insignificance.

When does one really belong to the next world? When one is so absorbed in thoughts of the hereafter that one tends to forget worldly matters. When one is so concerned with eternity that one forgets earthly concerns. When one is so preoccupied with thoughts of eternal content and torment that one's position in the world ceases to seem important. When one is so drawn towards life everlasting that one seems to be neglectful of the present world. When one's concentration is so fixed on sublime realities that one lives in this world, but is not of it. When the sight of worldly luxury only makes one wonder what will befall one in eternity. When affliction makes one cry out, "Lord, I cannot bear worldly torment; how will I be able to withstand the torments of the next world." When one neither derives satisfaction from the pleasures of this world, nor is affected by worldly difficulties.

Only when all of these conditions are fulfilled can one truly be said to have faith in the life to come. The gates to heaven will be opened for such fortunate souls.

Heavenly Conduct

Heavenly conduct has repercussions within a human being; it brings the verdure of paradise to the soul. One might seem to be active, but if one is not benefiting spiritually from one's actions, then they are worthless. Truly virtuous action should spark off divine consciousness in one's mind; it should make one's heart beat with a divine rhythm; it should move one's soul to ecstasy; it should make something tremendous happen within one, to open a window on sublime realities.

What is important as far as the next life is concerned is not what one is doing, but what one is becoming. One may be very busy in life; one may have a long list of achievements to one's credit; but if one is inwardly unaffected, then one's actions are futile. What is the good of the wind if it does not carry oxygen? What is the good of water if it does not quench one's thirst? What is the good of food if it fails to nourish? What is the good of the sun if it does not produce light? If all these things were present without their properties, then they might as well not be there at all.

One who is not fit for heaven utters empty words, which do not echo within him. He acts, but his actions do not touch his soul. On the contrary, the actions of a godly person are spiritual experience in themselves; they provide nourishment for his soul. His external actions deeply stir his innermost being.

Who will be Granted Paradise?

Paradise cannot be gained at a paltry price; it belongs only to those fortunate souls who prove themselves to be God's true servants. Belief does not just mean adding some rituals to a normal worldly life; true belief entails the governance of one's whole life by Islam; it means devoting oneself heart and soul to the worship of God.

Islam should radically change a person's life, for the believer finds God so close that he enters into communion with Him. Angels become his companions in times of solitude. He keeps his tongue in check, being conscious of his responsibilities to the Lord. He strictly obeys God's commandments. True Islam makes a person live in this world as if he were standing before God and being judged.

The awareness of truth that comes to believers in this world will come to unbelievers only after death, when it is too late. When God becomes visible to man, all will believe in Him, but the believer has faith while God is still invisible. True believers anticipate the severity of the Day of Resurrection in the world: others will have that experience only in the next world.

Who will be Saved

To be deserving of heaven in the next world, one must experience it in this world: one must attain the spiritual upliftment, which will qualify one for heaven in the hereafter. Fear of Judgement Day should make the hair on one's body stand on end. One's heart should be illuminated by manifestations of God's glory, which make one feel close to Him. One should suppress feelings of anger and vengeance, demonstrating thus what the forgiveness of the Lord will be like. One should witness through one's own tears of contrition the scene of a forgiving master pardoning his repentant servant. One should pardon those who are at one's mercy, in the hope that God will be forgiving on the day that one will be totally at His mercy. One should control one's tongue, though one is able to speak at will. One should bow before the truth on earth, as others will in eternity.

The believer is a flower of the garden of paradise, which sprouts in this world and blossoms in the next. He experiences in this world what others will experience after death, when it is too late. People's reaction to the various circumstances they face in life will determine whether they are fit for heaven or Hell; if they respond in a satanic manner they, prove themselves fit for Hell, and if they respond in an angelic manner, they prove themselves worthy of heaven.

Without Paying the Price

Man has to offer his own being in return for paradise. Whoever sacrifices his life for God will find eternal reward. There is no other way of earning salvation.

There comes a time in everybody's life when one has to sacrifice something—one's self, one's honour, one's property or one's life itself—for the sake of one's religion. Whoever makes the required sacrifices at such times is worthy of God's favour. Whoever stops short of self-sacrifices in God's path will be permanently denied His blessings.

Paradise is so priceless that nothing we have can pay

for it. God has nonetheless put a trivial price on it, that is, the sacrifice that we must make for it. The only thing that lies between man and paradise is that he should give up his insignificant self to God; that he should expend all his paltry wealth for the sake of God; that he should spend his time on earth serving God. To accept truth is a sacrifice; to give up one's wealth for the cause of God is a sacrifice; to spend one's time and energy working for God's cause is a sacrifice; to put up with displeasing circumstances for God's sake is a sacrifice.

What a small price to have to pay for such a great gift! Yet man is so unwilling to pay even this paltry price that he passes his short time on earth without doing so.

Heavenly Actions

Those who delight in heavenly action in this world will taste the delights of paradise in eternity. Heaven is for those who depend more on God's invisible support than on the visible props of this world; who love and fear God above all things; who are willing to obey the Prophet under any circumstances; to whom eternity matters more than this world; who prefer to acknowledge truth

than to reject it; who derive more satisfaction from tears shed for God's sake than from heedless peals of laughter. If a question of pride comes in the way of acknowledging the truth, they are ready to accept the truth at the cost of wounded pride. Forgiving those who wrong them pleases them more than seeking revenge. Fairness to others is dearer to them than usurpation of others' rights. They prefer to suppress the feelings of envy and contempt, which flare up within them than to express them. They do not form a bad opinion of others, but prefer to think well of everyone.

The Heavenly Traveler

God requires man to offer up his wealth for God's sake. In return, He has promised man salvation in the next world.

Man evades his responsibilities, excusing himself on the grounds of the difficulties of life, but these difficulties are precious opportunities, which could be availed of to please his Lord. The stumbling blocks, which hinder a person in real submission to God, are, in fact, openings for spiritual enlightenment. They provide him with opportunities for real progress. Life's tribulations

should not discourage one: one should overcome them and continue on one's journey, for they are stages on the path to God.

God's most beloved servant is the one who suppresses his desires for God's sake; who gives up the comforts of life on His behalf; who surmounts all obstacles in his journey towards God. One does not succeed in this world by accumulating wealth; one succeeds by spending one's wealth in the cause of God.

The healthiest are those who have lost their health in the path of God. The richest are those who have impoverished themselves for God's sake. The highest in esteem are those who have lost worldly esteem in the service of the Lord. The most fortunate are those who reach their Lord with nothing but good deeds to their credit. These are the ones on whom God will shower His mercy.

The Inheritance of Paradise

The believer is like a solid tree, which is nourished by the whole universe. Sustained by his belief, he grows like a splendid tree, with his roots spread out under the ground and his branches reaching up into the sky. Never deserted by divine succour, he exudes

freshness and vitality at all times. He prospers in this world and the next.

The unbeliever, on the other hand, is like a bramble bush, or a weed which grows on the surface of the earth, bereft of divine succour. He is unstable in this world, and will give no fruit in the next. He loses out in both places.

God has given unbelievers some rein in this ephemeral world, and the opportunities they have been given on earth should be seen in this light. Since they are being tested in this world, they have the chance to grow and develop temporarily on earth. But when the period of trial has run its course, they will burn forever. The only souls to inherit the luxuriant world of paradise will be those who have shown a true devotion to the Lord on earth.

Heavenly Character

God requires men of excellence to take up their abode in paradise. To this end, He has provided models throughout the cosmos to inspire human beings to attain that level of excellence. Take the iron found in the cosmos. That is man's model for human resoluteness. The water, which gushes forth

from barren rocks, is his model for leniency and compassion. The immutability of the laws of nature shows man how faithfully he must keep his promises. The fragrance, colour and beauty of the material world are there to inspire man to deal equitably with others. The fact that billions of stars remain in orbit without colliding is an example of how man should operate within his own sphere and avoid clashing with others. Returning good for evil is exemplified by the trees that take in harmful carbon dioxide and supply us with life-giving oxygen in return. The mountains and everything that stands erect cast their shadows on the ground as if in self-prostration: man is required in the same way to be humble. He should never be proud or domineering. Whoever wishes to share in God's eternal blessings should be pleased only with that which pleases God; he should obey God, as the cosmos does.

The iron of the cosmos should be the model for human resoluteness. The water, which flows forth from hard rocks, gives man the example of leniency and compassion. The laws of nature are immutable; so man is required to be faithful to his promises. The world of matter is fragrant, colourful and elegant; man following the same pattern should deal equitably with others. Billions of stars revolve continuously, but never collide with one another; man following

this cosmic pattern should operate within his own sphere, being careful to avoid clashing with others. Trees take in carbon dioxide and supply us with oxygen in return; this action is required on a human level in the observance of certain ethical values, such as doing good even to those who harm one. Mountains, and everything that stands erect, cast their shadows on the ground as if in an act of self-prostration; so man is required to be humble in the same way; he should not be domineering or proud.

People of Paradise

Those who live by the Book of God receive God's special favours in this world, and are promised heaven in the next world. But they will be granted them solely on the basis of their own actions. People of the Book tend to forget this proviso: they take it for granted that, whether they follow God's commandments or not, God's promise to them will be fulfilled, and they will surely enter the kingdom of heaven.

True religious spirit makes one realistic. As long as the followers of revealed religions possess this spirit, they will realize that God is just, and will reward people according to their actions alone.

On the other hand, when people lose the true religious spirit, they take to wishful thinking. Real actions give way to false hopes. They think that they will be admitted into paradise because they belong to a certain community, whether they do good deeds or not.

Success in the hereafter is for those who conform to divine justice on earth; who live according to the will of God; who fear Hell before confronting it, and long for heaven before seeing it.

Eternal Bliss

God's acceptance of righteous actions is marked by wondrous sensations, which introduce one to the heaven, which has been promised to God's true servants in the life to come. Thus believers discover the fragrance of the garden of paradise in this world. They hold such sensations dearer than all worldly pleasures.

When one gives true charity to a needy person and finds the rewards with God: when the recitation of the Qur'an brings tears into one's eyes: when one experiences moments of anguish which make one feel close to God; when one's voice trembles and

one's heart throbs as one utters the prayers which God has put into one's heart; then one is partaking of the provision of the Lord in spiritual form. One is tasting of the fruits of paradise, which God has kept in store for his righteous servants.

The thrills of true faith are the form, which the fruits of paradise take in this world. In eternity they will take the form of the everlasting blessings of heaven.

If one is not close to God in this world, then how can one hope to be close to Him in the next world? If one does not derive joy from one's worship in this world, then how can one hope to be rewarded with eternal bliss in the hereafter?

A Flower of Paradise

The true believer is a flower of paradise. His fragrance is manifested in the form of divine characteristics in this life, which will be transformed into tangible blessings in the hereafter. Heaven is another name for these blessings.

The believer is one who is so involved in the hereafter that he becomes indifferent to the world. He puts up with any suffering that others may cause him.

He is so conscious of his own failures that he does not mind being criticized. If others humiliate him, he forgives them for God's sake. His heart has been purified by true devotion to God, so he forgives and forgets others' excesses. He is so free of malice that he prays for those who wrong him.

God is pleased with such souls and will admit them into paradise. Paradise is a refined world that only refined souls can enter. Those who lead negative lives and act in a spiteful manner are not worthy to dwell in it.

People think that they are bound for heaven, but they are far adrift from that destination.

Those Who Bow Before God

God requires for paradise realistic souls who live as if they are seeing God, though He is invisible; who are so conscious of God's greatness and perfection that He is always in their thoughts. Their lives should be so centred on God that their hearts should pulsate to His words.

The wondrous world of paradise will be inhabited by those who are so devoted to God that He comes to

dominate their lives; who raise their consciousness to a level which enables them to look at themselves objectively; who, although they are free, place constraints upon themselves and practice self-discipline.

When one reaches this stage of high-mindedness and realism, one develops objectivity in one's thinking; one begins to see oneself in a true rather than a personal light; one submits totally to the Creator, though one is not forced to do so; one keeps to God's commandments, even in the face of temptation; one accepts truth fully, even though one is in a position to reject it; one has the same attitude of submission to the Lord of Creation now, when He is invisible, as one will have when He becomes visible in the hereafter.

Virtuous Life

Those who are patient and do not despair in the face of disaster, are fit to live in paradise. They pray for those who hurt them. They do not mind being criticized. They act justly to everyone, even those who wrong them. They are fair and honest in their dealings with others.

The true believer requites evil with good. Only those who are ever mindful of God are blessed with pure lives of this nature, that is, those who discover God on such a profound level that He permeates their beings and becomes the focal point of their emotions.

Where unbelievers are arrogant, believers bow in humility. Where unbelievers are contemptuous, believers are considerate. Where unbelievers bear ill-will, believers are well-wishing. Where unbelievers usurp others' right, believers render to everyone his due. Believers are not prevented by false pride from acknowledging the truth. Believers never forsake justice, even when they are tempted to seek revenge.

God's Envoy

Those who are bathed in the light of God are fit to preach the word of God. Whatever they say comes from Him. Thus it becomes possible for them to sing God's eternal praises on earth. Yet man does not take heed. His heart remains sealed.

Preaching God's word is not like playing a record. One can only preach when one has experienced something like a volcanic eruption within one's soul. A preacher's whole being must be deeply involved in

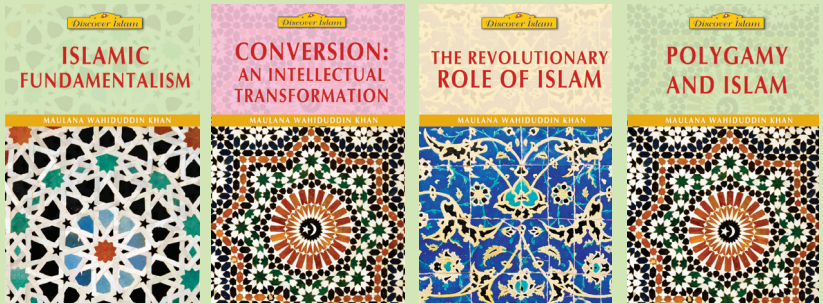
what he says and writes. His song is not just words and music; it is an expression of a delicate spiritual communion with the Lord.

But how strange it is that even such divine words fail to move people's hearts. The preacher warns his people with earnestness and intensity, and his whole being testifies to the truth of this warning, but people are deaf to his call. He pipes to his people but they do not lament. He shows people the kingdom of heaven, but they are not enraptured. He warns them of a blazing Hell, but they show no fear. He explains to people the signs of God, but they do not fall prostrate.

Man proves himself to be the most insensitive, although allegedly the most sensitive of all God's creatures.

Discover Islam

In this series, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan presents the fundamental teachings of Islam in a simple way. The series provides the general reader with an accurate and comprehensive picture of Islam—the true religion of submission to God.



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